Charlestown Navy Yard,
Monday Evg. July 10/71

Dear Friend Webb,

Yes, I am indeed sadly wanting in my part of the correspondence, & you are very good to write to me without waiting my reciprocations. I mean just that, for we are always very glad to receive a letter from you, & to know that your thoughts turn so willingly & pleasantly to our home on the Leicester hills. I began to write you, about a month ago, & got 2 pages along, & was compelled to leave it, & when I saw it again liked it so little that I, as the lawyers say, "quashed" it. But I hope you will not be deterred from writing to us by anything. If you cannot come to see us yourself, in propriâ personâ, we shall want to hear from you as often as you can write, & as long as we live.

And you know before this — I dare say — certainly before getting this, what has happened to us; & it is that which moves me to write you now. Ah — dear friend — we have lost our dear Samuel J. May, — in a sense, & a pretty close sense too, lost him. Still, it is a fact, that, as I advance in age, I do not feel that permanent separation, (or rather indefinitely long separation) from friends that die, that I used to feel when I was young. Can this be explained entirely by our greater familiarity with and experience of, that change? I do not think so. I believe we come, by insensible degrees, to feel, — more than that, to be convinced, — that the term of such separations sensibly diminishes, and that death really means less, in that respect, than it did when we were in the first flush, or in the prime, of life. — But we are none of us old enough not to feel that we have met with a very great loss in the departure of S. J. M. It has come very close to a great many, and the expressions of regard, respect, nay affection for him come from very many quarters, in distant public journals as well as nearer, — & from multitudes at & around his home. And we know that you will easily understand & believe this. You have seen & known enough of him, to feel very sure of his affectionate nature, which naturally went out to meet all who came into his circle, & which was so sure to attract & link to itself the regard & usually the warm attachment of others. It is hard to believe we shall see his face never again in this mortal sphere — never hear his musical voice nor his merry laugh, so sure to stir the mirth & cheerfulness of all around.

I have been sending you ~~many~~ various newspapers relating to him; a "Chr. Register" with an Editorial sketch of his character, written by T. J. Mumford, one of the editors, & brother of your friend S. Mumford at Detroit; — also a Syracuse "Standard" of July 7, containing a pretty fair report of the protracted funeral services, at the Church first, & afterwards at the Grave. And I saw at Syracuse a copy of the same paper, of July 3d, with a long Notice of S. J. M. by Mr. Fitch, one of its Editors, addressed to you & ready for mailing. These, with the various items, & extracts from other papers, you will also find in them, will show you something of the loving estimation in which the man was, & his memory is, held. I can't say there is very much mourning in the case, though tears I saw freely shed all around. There is so strong a feeling that he had "finished his work", had "kept his faith", had maintained his integrity of soul unsullied, his love of all men & his sympathy with all suffering men so free from selfishness; that no callous spot had formed in his heart; that in short his stewardship was fully proved & approved, — that all look upon his death as a call to go up higher; as a promotion in the Master's service; where new fields will open to him but where he will not forget the old, and so great comfort and such grateful joy attend his departure. — Alas — so we try to follow him, beyond the grave, — and perhaps not wholly without use or purpose. His life was beautiful and good, even if he lives no more; but that such an experienced & well-trained capacity for good, for all beneficent service, should be extinguished and done forever, does seem a great contradiction.

I dare say you have heard from some quarter that for many weeks of this Spring & early Summer he has been very ill. The family kept it much to themselves at first, — for the reason that his second son, Joseph of Newburyport, was going to take a voyage to Fayal, for the benefit of his impaired health, & it was feared he wd. be made anxious & uneasy, & so lose in a measure the good he might otherwise get. They knew that Jos.'s heart was quite set upon the opportunity of the going which a friend (his older brother indeed) had put in his power, & they couldn't bear to have him lose it. But, at length, they felt they must let him know just how it was; & he went on to see his father, & at once determined to give up his voyage. We were all concerned at the tidings of him which came from time to time; and, had I not been tied down, hand and foot, by the duties I had undertaken at Leicester, I think

I shd. have gone on, at that time, to see him. But, then, there began to come more favorable reports. His physicians pronounced his symptoms improving, — decidedly better, — then gave assurance that he really was stronger; and his daughter, Charlotte, who had been much discouraged from the beginning, began to write quite hopefully; then we ~~h~~ heard of his riding out, — (he rode out 4 different days) — and the letters began to speak of a time when he would come to Boston, &c. (as he had been contemplating all winter.) We were indeed put completely at ease about him, — I mean that Ade. and I were, — & so were others, so far as we knew; — and I had fixed the end of July as the time of my going on to Syracuse to see him, (where I had not been since I was there with you & Deborah,) & turned my attention to the preparations for our great (great for a little town) Celebration at Leicester — [to which I invited you long ago, but you never declined it, nor did you accept it!] We were to have an "historical Celebration" of the founding of the Town, — 150 years ago, 1721, when the first Town-Meeting was held; and it involved an Addreſs in the open air, under trees, & a stand, & benches for 1500 hearers to be erected — a dinner for 1000 persons in a large Tent upon the Common — Music of a Band — Do. of a Choir — Speeches at the Dinner table — Programmes to be printed — funds to be collected — and a score of other things; all of which were going well, yet keeping us pretty busy, when a teleg. despatch came to me, the day previous to the Celebration, saying that Samuel J. May was no more. By the mail at night letters gave us further particulars. I determined to go to Syracuse to attend the last rites, & urged Ade. to go too. As we had then a house pretty full of young company, she at first thought it impoſsible, but before long a way became evident; — several of the party wd. leave Wed. morng. the 5th, and we could go in the afternoon, leaving the house in Beſsie's charge & Ruſsell's, (the latter was paſsing his brief vacation with us), and the 2 remaining visitors, young girls to be sure, but of whose discretion & steadineſs, when needful, we were very sure. ~~of~~. So, before evening of Monday, our plans for Syracuse were all arranged; & we gave our thoughts next day, the best we could, to ~~our~~ helping forward the Town Celebration. I am glad to say it was a great succeſs throughout — weather perfectly suitable — & all else harmonious & agreeable.

On Wednesday afternoon we left home, and at 4½ p. m took train at Worcester, finding my brother John in it, and Rev. Messrs Mumford and Tilden, both spiritual sons of S. J. May, & loving him most abundantly. Garrison had g on in the morning, with Miss Charlotte Coffin (sister of M S. J. M.); so also we found had Mr. George B. Emerson, M May's close friend for 57 years – his classmate in College, and A. B. Alcott, Mr. M.'s bro: in law. We rode all nig moving rapidly, & at 6 the next morning were at Syracuse 320 miles. We had "Sleeping Car" berths, & got a measu of sleep & rest. Alfred Wilkinson at that early hour was h at the Station, with 2 carriages, to take us all directl his house. We had not meant to do this, but he insiste and he took us all there. It was the new house, int which they moved last October; the old wooden house, w you & I were together, having been taken away, and ground well-graded to a handsome lawn, & a spaciou handsome, & extremely convenient house built in the edge of the Oak Grove which was just in the rear of th old house. There we found, besides his family (save th the 3 little girls had been taken by Mrs. Sedgwick to her ho – you see I am telling you all the details I think of, f I know you like these, and I know too that the minute matter connected with S. J. May's last moments will inte you) – I should say, at that early hour, we saw nobody, Alfd W. conducted us all to vacant rooms, where we c wash & refit; & on coming down stairs again, Charlotte ready with her cheerful, pleasant welcome – keeping her & serenity like a saint; & there we found both her brothe John Edwd, & Joseph, – Miss Ch. Coffin, – Mr. Alcott, Garri my cousin Fredk. Frothingham of Buffalo. We all met the largest parlor, & got the last particulars. Mr. May wa considered, on the day he died, better than on any day previ His physicians said so. He said, he "felt better". He saw visitors. Previous to that, they had restricted him in that re but that day he saw quite a number, for the first time. very intimate friend, Andrew D. White, President of Cor University, entering his chamber, said, "Why Mr. May, must live thirty years yet, and see the fruits of the goo seed you have sown"! And when, after a little, pleasa

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talk, Mr. White was leaving, & had got out of the room, Mr. May in a strong, natural, pleasant voice, & with his merry laugh, called out, "Oh, Andrew, don't you think you could let me off with 20 years?." And so they parted. At 9 p.m. his principal physician was there, said he was doing well, & left him. At 10, Mr. M. was taken with a sudden, general distress & pain; they sent, being much alarmed, for the physicians, & meanwhile applied all the relief they could, but to little purpose. Soon he said to Charlotte, "Do you think I am dying" – "Oh, father, I hope not", she said. He spoke no more; but lying back in the bed, looked wistfully at her. At first she did not understand, but soon said, "Do you want me to kiss you, father?" His eyes lighted up at once with evident pleasure to be understood; she kissed him, & immediately he was gone! And when the physicians came – not over ½ an hour from the sudden change – they found only a lifeless form. —— To my surprise, they did not propose any post mortem examination, though declaring themselves entirely unable to account for the sudden attack of pain, & its speedy result. ——

[Tues. A.M. 11th.]

The death came on them like the crash of the thunder, & stunn'd them for a while. Next (Sunday) morng. there was such a current of people coming to the house, that they put a couch in his "study" (which they had put in the same corner of the house where the old one was) & laid him on it, wrapp'd in a dressing gown wh. he had been wearing during his illness; a natural smile was recognized by all on his face, & shoals of people saw him thus. Then – as the funeral was not to be until July 6. – ~~it~~ the body was put in undertakers' charge to be ~~packed~~ surrounded with ice. [This method is somewhat common now, & maintains the condition as it was at death. No sinking of eyes, mouth, or other change of appearance, occurs.] The body was still in ice, when we arriv'd. Thursday morning.

– At or before 9, the quiet, subdued, but cheerful breakfast was over; Charlotte saying, "Oh, how father would enjoy seeing you all here. I wish he could." When we went back to the large parlour, we found the coffin – & body – lying in the centre a private service at the house had been arranged, upon which we immediately entered. F. Frothingham read some Scriptures,— "Bless the Lord, O my soul, & all that is within me,— bless his holy name". Then Rev. W. P. Tilden offered a prayer — one worthy the name;— and then A. B. Alcott spoke, as a man & a brother might speak of S. J. M. All present said they had never known him so clear, so full of meaning, so perfectly intelligible. One lady present said, he was "thoroughly human," as he had never to her apprehension before been. After a few more words, his sons, my brother, & I, went with the body to the Church, where already large numbers had collected, & where (we learned) a steady coming of people continued for 3 hours. After going back to the house, ~~in the morning~~, we heard from several persons some reminiscences of Mr. May's early life,— particularly from George B. Emerson. There it was agreed that there must be a Memoir of his life, and it was by the family confided to the charge of Mr. Emerson, Mr. Mumford, & myself. [Lest I forget it, in the pressure for time wh. is upon me, I say here, that I wish you could give us some of your impressions of ~~the~~ him, & any recollections of your intercourse with him; we shall find them very useful in preparing the book.] We intend a small book — i.e. not much, if any, larger than his Antislavery Recollections, & written for general reading. The record of such a life we think will be good seed sown for the future.

After luncheon we all went to the Church, & found barely room enough (reserved for us), & the house packed full. As I have sent you, by this mail, a paper with Reports of the services at Church, & at the Cemetery, I will not enlarge, or repeat. There seemed an atmosphere of the greatest peace and comfort about us. So many had brought white lilies, white roses, the white clematis, & other vines & flowers, that it appeared as if all the gardens of Syracuse must have yielded up their treasures. We were 3 hours in the Church — so outpouring were the tributes of respect and affection. Mr. Loguen, the colored preacher, was evidently oppressed

* But the "Spy"'s Reporter made wretched work of all that was not prepared to his hand.

Is it time you heard from Richard at Australia? Yrs. always, S.M.

P.S. I made a very fair, & well-received speech at the Leicester anniversary, on the Dissenters; Non-conforming & [illegible] clergy in ministry,— & the [illegible] who needed in the town. *

by the difficulty of saying what he wished to say. Favorite hymns of his were sung – "While Thee I seek, protecting Power" – "Awake, my Soul, stretch every nerve, And press with vigour on" – "Nearer, My God, to Thee;" – and then, at the Close of the Services at the Grave, Where the little Sunday School children dropp^d flowers in, they all sung together "Rise, My Soul, & stretch ~~out~~ thy wings, Thy better portion trace," &c.

It was a day of the greatest interest & excitement and of consequent fatigue. It was 7½ o'clk. before we were returned to the house. I slept, with others, at Mrs. Barnes's, – I think Deborah was with her a while – and the next morning, five of us left together for the East, – others going Westward – my bro. John returning, the night before, immed. after close of the funeral services. – An excellent "Drawing Room Car" gave Messrs. Emerson, Mumford, Tilden & myself, & Ade., fully oppo. to confer together about our friend, and the proposed memoir. Riding some 270 m^s., Mr. Emerson, Ade, & I, stopp^d & spent night at Springfield. And, next morning, home.

Nobody will wonder that we were both extremely exhausted. A very good night's rest partially restored us; but I feel the effects of the great strain still upon body & mind both.

I know I have written too hurriedly for your reading; but it is all I can do; & now I must go & see my dear old mother, whom I have not seen for nearly 3 weeks. She is now staying with her sister at Brookline and is in pretty good health. – Recently a letter came addressed in your hand "Miss Bessie May", which, Bessie opening, she found it to be to Ade, & was greatly disappointed! I have several notes from you, which I have not particularly acknowledged, – much less answered – but I mean to do better. I send you my love – I know you had S.J.M.'s – & I send love too to Deborah, & my high regards to Alfred.

Is it true you heard from Richard at Australia? Yrs. always, S.M.

P.S. I made a very fair, & well received speech, at the Leicester anniversary, on the Difficulties, Non-conforming & Heterodox clergy or ministry – & the [illegible] really pleased in the town. *

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